The Medical Librarian as Manager; or the Fruits of Fadism*

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THANK You, Dr. Brodman†, I appreciate your kind introduction. It is an added pleasure because, though I did not meet you personally for some years later, you had been one of my early heroines of medical librarianship since I first became embroiled in scientific and medical libraries in the early fifties. My admiration was based on your contributions to the literature and your reputation as an awesome intellectual. I have never been disappointed in these judgements of mine over the past twenty-five years.

I am also deeply moved to be able to honor Janet Doe, for whom these lectures are named. It occurred to me as I was preparing this talk, that, as I plunge faster and faster into middle age, not so many years from now there will be a Doe Lecturer who probably will never have had the opportunity to have met or known Miss Doe. And that is a pity.

I first met Miss Doe when I was a library school student in New York, but even as a student I got around to professional meetings, and even a rare and exciting reception at the fabulous New York Academy of Medicine Library of which she was Librarian for so many years. Not so long after Miss Doe's retirement in 1956, I was lured to Boston by the late Ralph Esterquest of Harvard University. In my title, as Assistant Librarian, lurked the formidable and mysterious words, "Resources and Acquisitions." In any case, at that time, this included cataloging—never to this day my forte.

As Ralph and I perused the instrument that had developed as the library's card catalog over fifty-some years, we decided that we were well over our heads in knowing what to do to bring things into consistency with our vision for the tool needed in the then proposed Countway Library. The answer: Consultant! I will not repeat the cogent details of Miss Doe's career which are set forth so lovingly by Thomas Keys in the April 1975 *Bulletin*, but suffice it to say that she was not a difficult consultant choice to come up with. Miss Doe and Miss Susan Haskins of the Harvard College Library did survey the catalog and came up with the principles that we are still using today in Countway.

What astonishes me even today was the clarity and incisiveness of Miss Doe's recommendations: such things as "divided catalog," "new classification scheme," "redefinition and declassification of serials." Some of these concepts bring gasps, polite but audible, from catalogers today—and this from a "librarian emerita."

Janet extended warmth, good New England common sense, and an infectious enthusiasm that made me really want to be a good librarian.

Miss Doe is now a lady of some years and in happy retirement; let us hope that we can keep her and her spirit alive for many years to come.

My third introductory remark is less serious and more personal: it deals with that aberrant year, referred to by Dr. Brodman, when I interrupted my thirty-two-year unbroken romance with libraries to go to work for a trucking company. In simple fact, I was saving money after college to go on to graduate school. It was a wretched year—although not without its lessons—and not without its moments of black humor. In spite of my fancy title, Assistant to

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the Superintendent of Transportation, I was a dispatcher. In the interstate trucking business, the dispatcher's role is to monitor the progress of those huge trucking rigs from their starting point to their destination, for, among other variables, punctuality was paramount. This was and is done by having the trucks stop at intermediate stations along the way and report in "pony express style," at which time a teletype message was sent from the way-station to headquarters in Grand Rapids (a now somewhat more famous city than then for totally other reasons).

The dispatchers had huge pads of ruled paper on their desks on which they kept track of the progress of these trucks across the verdant or icy countryside. If a driver should be careless enough, or if a mishap occurred, and he did not meet his ETA (to you layfolk, Estimated Time of Arrival), then all hell broke loose in our office.

I guess (in fact I am sure), it was because I was a "college graduate," that I was given a specialist's job. I monitored a particularly important species of cargo, known to us in the trade as "hot loads." "Hot loads" were those shipments which, because of their physical nature, or the customer's whim, had to be delivered on an unwaveringly rigid schedule (and at an unwavering surcharge). Most of these were perishables, so the need was obvious. They were transported in refrigerated trailers (known again, to us in the trade, as "reefers"). Now, if I discovered that a hot load was not meeting its checkpoint ETA, I made this known, and the office would suddenly become tense and quiet. The chief dispatcher's brow would furrow, and one imagined the headquarters of Scotland Yard or Interpol as he mobilized his interstate forces to "find that truck!" It was high melodrama.

One of the company's best, most regular, and lucrative customers was The Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo. Our job was to get truckloads of fresh codfish livers from the eastern United States to Kalamazoo where magic pharmaceutical fingers transformed the gooey mess into that favorite child's nostrum, cod liver oil. These were always refrigerated hot loads, and therefore in my province. Only twice during my one year of service did mishap befall a load of livers, but the memory is unforgettable. Since it was *not* among my duties to put into effect any of the tracing and maintenance and rescue procedures, I could sit back and watch the drama unfold, with vivid pictures of a broken-down truck somewhere in Pennsylvania or Ohio and those *tons* of cod livers either freezing into a disgusting mass, or sizzling and baking in the noonday sun.

You may wonder what this bizarre chunk of autobiography—this piece of pentimento—has to do with medical librarianship. I assure you that it has none. And yet is that true? Are we not ourselves in the business of delivering loads of bibliographic data and printed facts to our customers—and are not some of these loads "hot loads" that are perishable if not delivered on time? And do we not adopt a James Bondian mien if the postal service fails us, although we seem to be pretty powerless to do much about that except to switch to UPD or some alternative? There *is* a tenuous connection.

The title of my lecture this morning, and it is printed in your programs, is "The Medical Librarian as Manager." This would seem to be a perfectly topical and timely subject for a talk —but would it fall into the definition of "history or philosophy of medical librarianship"? I think not.

There is a subtitle to my lecture that is not printed in your program—and that is "The Fruits of Fadism."

Dr. Frank Rogers, that most Dostoevskian of medical librarians, made a statement some years ago, and it has stuck with me; I paraphrase him, "In this imperfect world, it is tempting to think of a single, perfect solution to a problem." And so it is and has been since the great leap forward of librarianship that followed on society's discovery that scientific information can be usefully applied to current scientific problems.

I am not a historian, but let me go back in my "clearly selective" memory of twenty years or so and pick out some of the discoveries or proposals that, at the time, seemed tempting as really solid answers to our problems. Many of our problems at that time fell under the phrases, "bibliographic control," and "information retrieval," and, oh, there were some ingenious ones. Vannevar Bush's MEMEX made everyone's head snap up with the pioneer vision of the black box that would contain and spell out on command information of any sort. Bush's vision was prophetic, but it led to decades of questions of what some of us call the "Sunday Supplement" type of user expectation—"Why not store it all in a machine?" ("all" is never

very clearly defined in these questions). And questions persist in spite of the advances that have been made over these decades. Indeed, we do come closer to the vision.

There has been fun along the way: to be nostalgic, remember coordinated indexing, Mortimer Taube, and edge-notched cards. somewhat like IBM cards in appearance, but coded around their periphery with holes to be notched to stand for certain subjects, names, dates, or whatever? A processed deck of cards was placed together, and needles (not unlike acupuncture needles) were inserted through the holes to match up the various elements to be coordinated in the search. Needles in place, the deck was shaken vigorously, and those cards having the same notches, and presumably the same characteristics, would fall out of the deck. Voila!

Again, being nostalgic, remember Ralph Shaw and the Rapid Selector, a mechanical device. I recall Mortimer Taube's statement—and perhaps "Taube's Law" that the shorter the input time into a retrieval system, the longer the retrieval time—and the corollary: the quicker the retrieval time from a system, the longer (and perhaps more expensive) the input time.

My personal favorite at that time was the "Peekaboo" system, in which holes were made in cards to code information, and then the deck was held up to the light and if one could see through, he knew he had a match. I do not recall now how one got the matches out of the deck, but it was an ingenious system, and lots of fun.

There were many, many more such proposed systems. But they were very personal systems: good for a scientist's reprint collection, or for the circulation system of a small library. After all, how many edge-notched cards can one acupuncture, and how many peekaboos can one efficiently make to get an answer? They were faddish, to be sure, but there was no bandwagon effect in libraries. There were *uses*—but not *abuses*.

Some of the theoretical work, however, was having an effect on what was about to emerge. The systems above depended on a "yes"-"no" theory. If a card was edge-notched and it fell out, it was a "yes"; if it did not, it was a "no"; in "Peekaboo," if you saw light, it was a "yes," if you did not it was a "no."

Enter IBM and the punched card! In a card, a coded punch would be a "yes" and no punch at all would be a "no"—not unlike the now "quaint" systems I have mentioned—except that it was *mechanized*! That meant speed, the ability to handle larger decks of cards, and the lack of error in processing what had been put into them. Suddenly, the keypunch, the sorter, the verifier, and the accounting machine became household words in libraries, librarians went to school to learn how to "wire the boards" of these "infernal machines," and guided by the altruistic hands of IBM, librarians began encoding all kinds of data—and getting out all kinds of products. Here was data-processing equipment: national availability, pushed by a hugely successful company, and somewhat satisfying to the library user who was looking for the black box.

Then came the computer!

But let me backtrack a little for the sake of nostalgia. Concurrently with what we have been talking about there was the miniaturization phase in libraries. Microfilm was surely the answer to the problem of libraries generally. Why, you could get the contents of a huge and costly library into a nine by twelve room and retrieve it with ease. There was, of course, the microcard (both opaque and transparent), and there was microfiche. You could actually get the text of Gray's *Anatomy* into a microdot the size of the head of a pin! Some of these efforts are still with us in one form or another, and probably rightly so.

Let me pause in this Proustian stream of consciousness for a moment and tell you what I am getting at, because history it certainly is not. I have subtitled this paper "The Fruits of Fadism." Webster's Third, while confessing that the origin of the word "fad" is unknown, defines it as "a practice or interest followed for a time with exaggerated zeal." I shall let you decide for yourselves which of the systems I have touched on so far have been, or still are, fads.

And I would like to mention a few more and get a little closer to *medical* librarianship: book catalogs, core lists, union lists, audiovisuals, AIM/TWX, hospital library consortia, MEDLINE, *Abridged Index Medicus*, storage libraries, computer-assisted instruction, regional library networks, xerox copying, management by objectives, and specialized information centers. Again, I shall allow you to decide for yourselves which of these were, are, or will be fads. Remember, the key phrases in the definition of

fad are: "followed for a time" and "exaggerated zeal."

Now, lest you think me arch or oracular, let me say that I believe *fads* belong in *fashion*, not in professionalism, and not in medical librarianship. Fad deals with the length of a woman's skirt or the height of a man's heel; it is what the grille of the newest Pontiac will look like. It has to do with music, with theater, with vacation spots, and with sexual behavior. Fads are for the delight and titillation of the crowd; they provide fodder for small talk; and they keep busy people who have no inner resources or talent for anything more profound.

In professionalism, and in medical librarianship specifically, fads are expensive, transient, frequently iatrogenic, distracting from one's goals, and disillusioning. Question: How does one tell a fad from a real breakthrough? Do all advances go through a "fad stage"?

This was entirely true of X ray in 1896; within a year there were popular and utterly useless books on X ray published for a clamoring public; this seems to be true of acupuncture (which I spoke of irreverently earlier). I wonder if the part of "fadism" that so obviously offends me is the exploitation and hucksterism that accompany the discovery of a new idea or technique?

Let me talk about MEDLARS for a few moments. Several paragraphs back I paused in my nostalgic reverie with the arrival on the scene of the computer. Just as data-processing equipment was not designed for the use of librarians, neither was the computer. Bright minds in the library field, however, wasted little time in devising uses for them. Especially with the computer, the speed, storage capacity, and flexibility of products dazzled the imagination, and it was too tempting not to try to do something with it.

The death of manual indexing in our field came with the end of the [sic] *Index Catalogue*, when the backlog of unprocessed entries exceeded all of the published entries in all of the published volumes of that *Index*. Clearly something had to be done—or "bibliographic control," as we called it, in medicine would die. Again, to simplify vastly the historical record, the National Library of Medicine began to use the computer as an aid to publishing its bibliographic products, to speed them up—to preserve bibliographic control. At the same time the concept of computer storage and retrieval came to light—and after an agonizing birth, MEDLARS came to life. Subject searches with the capacity for many variables could be logically formulated and run against the computer's memory bank of bibliographic entries, and a search was produced. It worked!

Although MEDLARS I and its successors have progressed in a relatively orderly continuum, following (and sometimes aiding) technology, there have been moments of hucksterism—and even faddish elements. NLM obviously wanted to publicize a good thing—and clearly NLM officers had to rationalize within the bureaucracy the enormous research and development costs. Because it was something new, and because it came even closer to the idealistic "black box" that the public, both lay and scientific, yearned for, MEDLARS took on a kind of aura—arcane and fabulous. It was not aided by the early search specialist team, then being trained and regionally deployed who, without really intending to, became sibyline creatures whom one approached with hesitancy and awe.

A next technological step was the idea and the development of searching a computer data base by remote terminal. There were others toiling in the vineyards at this time: Frederick Kilgour and what was to become OCLC; the State University of New York and Irwin Pizer's SUNY System. Bureaucratic and technical problems beset NLM in its efforts, but one of the most ingenious and elegant solutions to the probably-carping bureaucracy, was AIM/TWX. Here was a small data base, relatively easy to handle, which could be queried by machines that either already existed locally or could be obtained at small cost.

In AIM/TWX, however, were the seeds of fadism. Despite its ingenuity, it was built on an inferior data base (*Abridged Index Medicus*), and it certainly had the characteristics of hucksterism (for whatever reasons), and there was a widespread "bandwagon" reaction. I heard, during this period, in Bethesda, a highly-placed officer of NLM (no longer with the library) say informally to a group of people, "You know, I was playing with AIM/TWX the other day, and I asked for citations on 'histopathology of the thymus,' and by God I got citations on 'histopathology of the thymus!'" I waited for him to finish his sentence or his story—but it seemed that that was the end of it.

And I asked, "Were they the right citations? Were there enough citations from which a reader could make an intelligent choice? Were they the latest citations?" My questions were met with a look of obvious hauteur. The *process* had clearly become the Lord of the *intellect*.

In spite of the proven success of MEDLARS and its antecedents, they have been the products, or victims, of oversell, or overkill, from the beginning. The earliest search strategists constituted an elite corps—they were usually paid more than journeyman reference librarians, and yet they were making use of only a single bibliography, whereas the "regular" reference librarian was left to cope with *Bulletin Signalétique* and *Meditsinskiĭ Referativnyĭ Zhurnal*, not to mention *Chemical Abstracts*, *Biological Abstracts*, etc., when doing manual searching.

A generation of health scientists is growing up believing that a search of *Index Medicus* or MEDLINE constitutes a comprehensive search of the literature, when clearly hundreds of quality journals germane to medicine are not indexed because they are actually, or probably, indexed in other reference tools. And I continue to be really concerned about that "hopefully rare" character, probably in a hospital library, who conceives of a search in *Abridged Index Medicus* as a quality search of the literature—or who believes that some incredible genius tucked away in a corner of NLM has selected the "best and the brightest" articles for inclusion in AIM. I can only hope that there is a sharp hospital librarian on hand to set him straight.

Now, with the proliferation of machine-readable data bases covering closely-related subject areas, and the probability of compatability, these dangers recede more and more into the background.

Let us turn for a moment to citation indexing: a truly unique idea, one that lent itself beautifully to computer processing, and one that disgorged from the machine a product that we had never seen before—and that could never have been duplicated manually—a true child of the machine. The professional literature was full of papers on citation indexing, but it took the acumen of Eugene Garfield and his Institute for Scientific Information to get a useful product into the libraries. There was a real fad quality about the process: exaggerated zeal, hucksterism, and exploitation. But the system worked and weathered the storm. The reference librarians at the Countway Library keep *Science Citation Index* (*SCI*), along with *Index Medicus*, closest to their desks—for two reasons, I believe: one, that to the uninitiated, *SCI* is difficult to learn to use and requires help; and two, that the librarians use it themselves as an important tool of choice.

Some of the more recent claims that *SCI*'s use in the selection or promotion of faculty members is the product of an overzealous imagination, and one quite naive in the sociology of scientists. The ability of *SCI* to predict Nobel Prize winners is pushing a good thing to its outer limits.

I do not wish to belabor this point further. Fadism does exist in all areas of our profession: from NLM to the smallest community hospital library. This phenomenon grows from pressures outside the institution, or pressures within the institution itself, or the overzealousness of individuals with faulty perspective and judgment.

I want to make it clear that I am not confusing "experimentation" with fadism. I have a perfect example of the value of the trial and error of experimentation on the stage with me right now. Dr. Brodman and her staff, who have never ceased experimenting with the use of computers in the middle-sized medical library, wondered if a computer-produced book catalog with its ability to be distributed rather widely throughout her community would be a useful addition to her library service. She tried it, evaluated it, and learning that its usefulness was limited, stopped doing it.

Fadism in librarianship drains us uselessly of energy that could and should be put to better, sounder use. We *must* be aware of new ideas and their possible implications for our libraries —but we must use our professional intelligence: experiment, watch, perhaps wait a little while before putting all our eggs in one basket—the specter of our new Ohio State Medical Library looms large in my mind (not because of the failure of the system, but because of fiscal naiveté among the University administration).

I remember a remark of Dr. Rogers again—not long after he had left NLM and gone to the University of Colorado. He said, "I understand now why librarians are so reluctant to make major changes overnight in their card catalogs or classification systems." And of course Rogers is right; faddish changes in a library (and it takes time to separate the wheat from the

chaff), not only "box you in" yourselves—but box in your successors, frequently in perpetuity. This way of approaching library problems is not "ultra-conservative," it is not "backward," it is not "negative"; it is simple prudence in a profession whose practitioners are duty bound to preserve a scholarly continuum, and exaggerated zeal should be studied with enlightened skepticism.

I seem to have taken up an inordinate amount of time talking about my unprinted subtitle: dealing with fadism; I should get on with the printed main title of my paper, "The Medical Librarian as Manager." No doubt you have guessed by this time the approach that I am going to take toward "management" in libraries.

Let me tell you at this juncture that so far I have done a little bit of warping of history to suit my purposes. I intend to play the devil's advocate to a degree, but by no means entirely. At the Countway Library we have several projects going that are based on modern management techniques, if one must call them that, and that within the next few weeks I shall be writing a foreword for a fine new book on modern management in libraries. So, take me seriously —but remember that I do not always practice what I preach.

First of all, I abhor the words "manager" or "management" as applied to libraries. It is at best a business term probably snuck in the back door via special libraries, which being largely business-oriented, toss these words around with abandon. Indeed, being in business, special libraries do have a concern with management, for they are the bosses, and employees are expected to earn their keep in their special libraries. What happens to the librarians under this set of circumstances? Frequently he or she become "information specialists," or some such thing to avoid what appears to be the odious term: "librarian." (This is the "camouflage" approach.) Another approach to maintaining identity is the "if you can't beat them, join them" tactic; I recently saw, on the ballot for the election of officers of the Special Libraries Association that the title of one of the candidates for President is "Libraries Manager."

May I return to Webster's Third to see exactly what we are talking about. The verb "to manage", the infinitive, is both a transitive verb and an intransitive verb. As an intransitive verb it means basically "to direct or carry on business or affairs." It is a reasonable definition of what many people do; there are certainly synonyms for the process, but neither the synonyms nor the word itself seem to make much sense to me as the activity that librarians perform. There must be motives behind this substitution, and we shall attempt to examine them.

First, however, let us look at the definition of the word "to manage" as a transitive verb: "handle, control; to make and keep submissive; to alter by manipulation." I, for one, think that there has been a subtle merging of the relatively benign (if unnecessary) definition of directing work or business—and the definition suggesting submission, control, and manipulation.

In a medical journal recently, my eye caught an advertisement for a tranquilizer. Glancing over the text, I saw the following phrase: "in large doses (x number of milligrams) useful for the *management* of the schizophrenic patient." I thought long and hard about that phrase: here was an ad designed, specifically and expensively, by ad men who make a career of understanding what will attract the attention of special kinds of people—and here was an ad aimed at doctors, that most human of professional groups, extolling the virtues of a drug that would control, keep submissive, and manipulate other human beings. Be it my own naiveté or an unbalanced sense of the need for human compassion, particularly for those with serious problems, I was grossly offended by the advertisement and its message.

It is distinctly possible that the librarian has reached something of an identity crisis. There are certainly today machines and systems that allow the librarian to assign tasks previously done alone to assistants. Does this relative freedom of time mean "time on my hands" for the librarian? And is he or she searching for things to do to fill it? If so, this is a malaise that bears a great deal of examination. I cannot discuss cures for such a malady here. But I do believe that an answer lies in the honing to greater excellence those things that librarians do well and have done well for centuries:

1. Selecting, acquiring, and acting as custodian of the record of man's accomplishments.

2. Organizing this record in a logical and understandable way so that desired pieces of it can be retrieved at a later time.

3. Retrieving portions of the record for a person who wishes to use it—and delivering it to him when and where he wants it and in the form he desires.

There is plenty of room for improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness with which these tasks are performed, and there is no reason in my mind why these tasks cannot be performed by "librarians." "Librarian" is a worthy title, and I can see no improvement to the librarian or to the users of our services by calling ourselves "managers." Indeed, I think of a manager as a manager of a vegetable concession in a supermarket—or the manager of a heavyweight boxer or a football team.

Librarianship has been through one stage in recent memory in which it sought to improve itself by grafting on the language of the so-called documentalists, and there were some intriguing "buzz words" circulating for awhile. Where are they now? Are we better off for having confused ourselves?

I feel the same way about "management science." In our dilemma about who we are, are we turning to the field of business, and are we fashionably merging that field's vocabulary with our own—and to what purpose? Are we improving our lot by blindly turning to the world of business, whose goals of profit making are so antithetical to our own? Are we really better off by studying the "determination of market segments and segment psychographics"?

I can remember years ago sitting in a colleague's room in Philadelphia and two of us reading to each other the abstracts of papers being presented at the American Documentation Association meeting downstairs in that hotel—and roaring with laughter at the pomposity of the language being used. I think the one that turned us on the most at that time was "heuristics" as applied to machine systems. Where is "heuristics" now?

I think that we were dealing then—as we are now—with a situation of fadism—it would seem to have all of the characteristics: exaggerated zeal, bandwagonism, and exploitation (how many of you see the glossy advertisements put out by the American Management Association?). Only time will prove the last criterion, "a practice *followed for a time.*" But I will lay odds on it.

Surely there is no harm in looking into the methodologies of other groups to discern whether or not we can learn a technique that will help us in our own field. However, the grave seriousness with which these forays are taken disturbs me. Are our most precious resources: creativity and enthusiams, being drained off by peripheral interests? Is a librarian-supervisor sitting in his office contemplating "market segments" rather than being out on the library floor nurturing his own staff members in how to serve the library's users? Are the persons that we attract to this newer, "jazzed up" version of librarianship the ones that we want to be the leaders of librarianship tomorrow?

Librarianship is an ancient and honorable profession. Its practitioners, "librarians" are honorable people. Through whatever permutations we go in the near or not so near future, we are likely to continue to exist. Let us make the best use of our time and minds while we are the active practitioners.

Thank you.

Now, if I have succeeded in irritating anyone in this audience, if I have made anyone angry, I consider this effort successful. If, on the other hand, I have raised latent questions in your minds, or possibly stretched your imagination, then I shall feel very successful indeed.